

# If My People Will Pray

by Brian Long

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer in revival and the conditional promise of God in 2 Chronicles 7:14.*

**Duration:** 1:11:01

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a powerful story about a man named Leon who had a reputation in town. The preacher asks Leon if he is willing to boldly testify about Jesus Christ and publicly share how he has been saved. Leon agrees and also expresses his desire to reconcile with his brother whom he had not spoken to for four years. The preacher emphasizes the importance of crying out to God in times of trouble and shares a personal story about his daughter being attacked by a goose. The sermon concludes with the preacher comforting a man named Roger who questions why God allowed his son to die and his wife to face health issues. The preacher assures Roger that God did not kill his son and offers support and empathy.

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## Transcript

I live in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and I noticed in the back there you have some Voice of the Martyr magazines and maps, and they're located in Bartlesville. That's actually where I live. The church that I pastor is actually in Barnesdall, Oklahoma.

It's a small town about 20 miles from Bartlesville. So, long ways from home, but I tell you, I've been blessed already. And you people are very precious people, and I've just been blessed to be here in your state, in this church, and Pastor Don, so good to see you guys tonight coming to join us.

So good to see everyone. Tonight we're going to be in Acts chapter 12, is where we'll actually be reading from tonight. Acts chapter 12.

But before we read our text, probably most of us, when we think of revival, one of the first verses in the Bible that comes to mind, at least for many of us, is 2 Chronicles 7, 14. 2 Chronicles 7, 14, where God says, If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land. That is a glorious promise, brothers and sisters, from God to us for revival today.

Someone told me one time, they said, Brother Brian, no, you don't understand, that promise was just for Israel. Well, yes, God was speaking to Israel, no doubt. But I want to tell you tonight that the Bible is not just a history book.

It's the living Word of God. God was speaking to Israel, yes, but God is also speaking today through His Word and through that very promise. This is a promise from God for revival today.

But what you and I have to understand is that it's a conditional promise. Notice that God says, If My people will, then I will. It's a promise with four conditions.

He says, If My people will humble themselves, pray, seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways. If My people will, then I will. And tonight, I want to speak to you about the second part of that promise, the second condition of that promise, and that is, If My people will pray.

If My people will pray. Do you remember when the Lord Jesus went into the temple and He found the money changers doing business in the house of God? There was a righteous indignation, a righteous anger that rose up in the Lord Jesus, and He made a whip of cords, and He drove out the money changers, He turned over their tables. And He said this, Is it not written that My Father's house shall be called, what? A house of prayer.

A house of prayer. What about preaching? Preaching is very important. But not My Father's house shall be called a house of preaching.

What about teaching? That's very important, teaching the Word of God. But not My house shall be called a house of teaching. My house shall be called a house of prayer.

Now, sometimes we think, well, this is the house of God. But, brothers and sisters, under the new covenant, the house of God is not made with human hands. And it wouldn't matter if we met here, or if we met under a tent somewhere, or if we met out in the woods out there.

Wherever the people of God together, there is the house of God, because the Holy Spirit lives on the inside of us. The church, the body of Christ, is the house of God. And, therefore, that body of Christ, the church, is to be characterized, above all, by prayer.

My house shall be called a house of prayer. God's people should be characterized as a people who know their God, who have a relationship with their God, who are constantly calling out to God, whether it be in praise and worship, singing, supplication, thanksgiving, offering our requests up to God, but a people of prayer. Prayer must be priority.

Listen to some of these quotes from men of God, that it was evident the hand of God was upon these men, and the way He used them and blessed their ministries. Listen to what they said. First of all, John Wesley.

John Wesley said, God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it. D.L. Moody said, every movement of the Spirit can be traced to a bent figure. Matthew Henry said, when God intends great mercy for His people, He first sets them a-praying.

Leonard Ravenhill said, no man is greater than his prayer life. The pastor who is not praying is playing. The people who are not praying are straying.

The pulpit can be a shop window to display one's talents. The prayer closet allows no showing off. In the matter of New Testament Spirit-inspired, hell-shaking, world-breaking prayer, never has so much been left by so many to so few.

He said, for this kind of prayer, there is no substitute. We do it, or we die. Prayer.

Jeremiah 33, God says, Call unto Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things that you do not know. Psalm 50, verse 15, God says, And call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. Over and over again through the Psalms and all the Word of God, God is calling us, His people, to call upon Him.

He's waiting. Call unto Me. I have this.

I want to show you things you do not know. I want to deliver. God wants to send revival more than we want to receive it.

For that, I am sure. But He waits. He waits for His people to humble themselves and to pray.

Now, why prayer? Because prayer declares our absolute, total dependence upon God. Prayer is saying, God, I need You, and apart from You, I can do nothing. Prayer says, God, my relationship with You is more important than anything else in life.

Prayer declares our dependence upon God. Prayerlessness, on the other hand, is the height of pride and arrogance. Because it's saying, people who do not pray are really saying, We can handle it.

We don't need God. We can have church without God. We can make decisions without asking God.

We can figure it out because we're so smart. It's the height of pride and arrogance to be a prayerless people. Prayer is our lifeline.

Prayer is a channel whereby the power of God and the presence of God flows from the throne of God, the throne of grace and mercy, to the people of God. Prayer is what connects us to God. Now, I remember a story about Bak Singh, who preached in India.

One night he was preaching a meeting, and this poor village man from an Indian village came to the meeting that night, and he'd never seen how electricity works. So the whole time, he was staring up at the ceiling, and he was just gazing upon this light bulb. It was shining.

It was giving light to all the house that night. And he was so impressed with that light bulb. After the meeting, he came up to Bak Singh, and he said, I want to borrow that.

I want to borrow that from you. So they took a cloth or something and unscrewed the light bulb, and he gave it to this poor village man, and the poor village man took it home. A couple of days later, he came back to the meetings, and he says, That's no good.

It doesn't work in my house. And Bak Singh said he had made a visit to this poor village man's house, and when he walked in, he saw right away why it wasn't working in his home. He had taken the light bulb, and he tied with a piece of string around the light bulb, he just tied it to his ceiling, and he was waiting for it to shine.

There was no electricity. There was no power. There was no connection to the power.

Brothers and sisters, prayer is the connection. When we call upon God, that prayer, prayer is the channel whereby the power of God flows into the hearts and lives of His people and of His church. Now, let's turn to Acts chapter 12, because I wanted you to see tonight, in this twelfth chapter of Acts, a wonderful and beautiful example of a praying church, and what happens when the church prays.

Acts chapter 12, we'll begin in verse 1. It says, Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church, and he killed James the brother of John with a sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. Then were the days of unleavened bread.

And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him, intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. So, what's going on here but that King Herod, he was being animated by the devil himself.

He had set out to persecute the church. They caught brother James and they killed him. They cut off his head with a sword.

He caught the apostle Peter also, and he had planned to do the same thing to Peter, but because it was the feast of unleavened bread, it was a religious holiday, and it really wasn't appropriate to have an execution that day. So, he decided to imprison Peter, and to wait till after this holiday to kill him also. What I want you to see is that it was a very, very dark day in the life of the early church.

The enemy had come in like a flood. And brothers and sisters, can we not see that it's the same right now? That we're living in very, very dark days. The enemy has come in like a flood.

The devil has attacked the church of Jesus Christ, which is such a threat to his kingdom. 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 8 says, Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Jesus said this of him.

He said this thief has come to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. He's come to divide churches. He's come to destroy lives.

We have a very real enemy. Revelation chapter 12 verse 12 says, For the devil has come down unto you having great wrath, because he knows he hath but a short time. And he's aimed his wrath and his fury at the church of Jesus Christ, which so threatens his kingdom.

He's aimed his arrows at the godly home. I tell you, more than anything else, Satan wants to destroy marriages, he wants to destroy families, he wants to destroy homes. Do you know how many children will go to bed tonight without either a father or mother in the home? And they will cry on their pillow at night because of the destruction of the family.

Divorce is rampant today. There is a flood of filth and immorality that is sweeping the teenagers away. Teenagers today are dabbling in witchcraft, thinking it's just nothing more than something to play around with, and they're becoming demon-possessed.

I know that because I've confronted it. And I've encountered young men and women who just got into it thinking it was harmless, and the devil got a hold of them. I want you to see that we have a very real enemy.

That's why, more than ever before, the church needs to be praying. Because we see that we're living in dark days, the enemy has come in like a flood, there are people in prisons of darkness and bondage. What is the answer for this world? Jesus.

The answer for this, the church, is the power of the Holy Spirit. But God says this, if My people will pray. He waits for us to humble ourselves and pray.

Now verse 5 says, it tells us that Peter was here being held captive, in chains, and in prison. But I want to ask you tonight, how many in this area right here of Wisconsin are also in prison and in chains? I'm talking about chains of addiction. I drove around, just drove around this afternoon, there's a bar at every crossroads.

How many are in the grip of alcohol and it breaks my heart because on the inside of those walls are people in prisons of darkness, despair, bondage, oppression, depression. They're in prison. How many in this area are in prison to methamphetamines, to drugs, to pornography? This thing is killing its millions and dragging them to hell.

How many are in this prison? Prisons of addiction, prisons of sin, chains of bitterness and unforgiveness. That's one of the greatest prisons of all. To be holding a grudge and to be in a prison of bitterness and unforgiveness towards someone.

Verse 6 says that Peter was asleep in this prison and sadly that is the very state of much of the church in our land today. She is asleep. There's nothing so alarming as the absence of alarm in the church.

That people are not trembling because of sin and trembling at the presence of God and awoken to the fact that people are going to hell outside these walls. The greatest danger for the church of Jesus Christ is for her to fall into this snare of the satisfied, this pit of complacency and to fall asleep. Oh, the devil would love to lull the church of Jesus Christ to sleep and just have you fall into a place of comfort and complacency because he's not threatened by a sleeping church.

Peter was asleep. The devil doesn't care if there's a church on every street corner as long as it's a prayerless church because he knows that a prayerless church is a powerless church. A prayerless people are powerless people but oh, when God's people begin to pray, when they begin to cry out to God and lay hold of God's promises and call upon the Lord, the devil trembles.

He trembles even when a grandmother gets upon her knees and begins to intercede for her grandchildren. He trembles when little children pray. He trembles when the church of Jesus Christ comes together in one accord and they begin to pray and that's what happens in our text.

Peter is kept in prison but the church prayed. Look at verse 5 again. Peter therefore was kept in prison but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Verse 5 is the turning point of this entire chapter and I'll tell you this, it'll be the turning point of your life tonight. It can be. It can be the turning point of the church.

Peter was kept in prison but the church prayed. Now what kind of prayer was it? I want you to notice three things that characterize this praying church. First of all, it was focused prayer.

There's two words there in verse 5 that I would have you to notice. It says, prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. That may seem very obvious.

I mean someone says, obviously all prayer is made unto God, isn't it brother Brian? But I want to tell you tonight there is much prayer that is not being made unto God. What is focused prayer made unto God? It's prayer that is focused upon God, that is God-centered, that is God-focused, God-conscious. Much of our praying is focused upon self.

Much of our public praying is more focused upon what somebody else is thinking about how I pray. Prayer that is made unto God is removing every distraction, rejecting every distraction that comes at us and is focusing upon the Almighty God who is our Father in heaven and calling out to Him. Focused prayer, prayer that is made unto God.

Are you really praying prayers that are Christ-centered, God-centered, God-sized prayers? In other words, when you're praying, do you realize you're praying to the One in whom and with whom nothing is impossible? Nothing is impossible with our God? Are you praying to the One who sits enthroned above the circle of the earth with heaven as His throne and the earth as His footstool? The very One who spoke into the darkness and said, Let there be light, and light was. Who spoke the word and planets were formed, galaxies, this entire universe at the spoken word of God leapt into existence. That's the God to whom we pray.

The Almighty God. God of heaven and earth. God who holds this universe in the palm of His powerful, omnipotent hand.

The same God who says to the ocean tide, You can come this far and no further. The same God who created the mountains and the trees and the grass and all that there is. This is the God to whom we pray.

The One who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name. The One before whose voice the mountains shake and tremble, the Red Sea parts. That's the God to whom we pray.

He's above all power and authority and principalities and rulers and dominions and kings and kingdoms. He's the One who sits king of the flood. He's the One who stood in a boat with His fearful disciples in the midst of a violent raging storm and He said, Peace, be still.

And even the wind and the waves obeyed Him. That's the Christ. That's the Lord.

That's the God. That's the Jesus to whom we pray. He's an Almighty God.

He's an all-powerful God. The One who rebukes a fever and it is gone. The One who touched the leper and the leper was made clean.

The One who said to a young girl, Talithai Kumai, and a young girl was raised from death to life. The One who stood outside of a tomb and said, Lazarus, come forth. And Lazarus, having been dead for four days, walked out of that grave alive.

That's the God to whom we pray. The God who heals cancer, who saves sinners and makes them into saints, who takes a murderer and makes him into an apostle, who opens blind eyes and prison doors, who

heals broken hearts and sets captives free. This is the God who sends fire from heaven.

He awakens nations. He revives churches. He transforms cities.

That's the God to whom we pray. Is that the God to whom you're praying? Is your prayer made unto God? Is it God-focused? Many of you know that a couple of years ago, my son was diagnosed with cancer and he had acute myeloid leukemia. It was the second worst type of cancer in the Children's Hospital in Oklahoma City where we were located.

He had very minimal chances of survival, apart from a miracle. And I tell you, it was one of the greatest trials that my wife and I had ever endured in our life. But one thing we learned during that time was to call out to God.

And we learned how important prayer was. Not just the prayers we were praying, but the precious saints all over this nation who would call me and write me and email me and say, Brother Brian, I'm praying. And I knew they weren't just offering up a cliché.

But they were praying from the depths of their heart. One precious sister up in Pennsylvania. A brother of mine in Kansas.

There's another sister in Colorado who fasted twice a week. Two full days a week for five months praying for my son. That's prayer.

Focused prayer. But I'll never forget this. I could share so many stories.

But the night when God turned the tide and touched my son, he was at the very brink of death. And I'd been given a promise from God that when we first found out he had cancer, I ran outside and I cried out to God. And I remember saying, Father, I only know one of two things you could be saying to us.

Either you're wanting to take Luke home to be with you. And I know Luke knows you. He would be in heaven.

And you want to do that for your glory? Or you want to heal him for your glory? I said, you know how painful it would be for me to let go. But I'm going to trust you either way, whatever you choose. But I cannot make it unless you give me a word.

I have to have a promise from you either way. And the Lord spoke to me so very clear. From John chapter 11, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

He says later on in that chapter, Did I not say unto you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God? I laid hold of those promises. And I trusted God with all of my heart because I knew they had come from Him. That He had spoken them to my heart.

He had confirmed it in the heart of my wife. Now was our face shaken during that time? Listen, many times it was tried. And this particular night, more than ever before, because when I was looking at my son in this hospital bed, there was no color in him.

He was as white as these walls. He was vomiting up stuff that was blood, but it smelled. I grew up on a ranch.

We had a dump, we called it the dead cow dump. And all the deads, we'd drug out there in the pasture and put them in that dump. There was a smell of death.

I do not exaggerate when I say what my son was vomiting smelled like that. It was the smell of death until he had no strength left in him. There was a lifeless body laying on the bed.

And I remember crying out to God that night from my gut, God, You've given me a promise. Please, Lord. And the Lord spoke to me so clearly.

He said, lift your voice in praise. Can you lift your voice in praise when your son is dying? When there's no evidence and you're looking at him and there's no evidence of him getting well, he's getting worse. And he's at the very brink of death.

And God said, lift your voice in praise. And that night, I just began to sing every praise song that I knew. I sang, oh, and then, oh, Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder consider how great Thou art.

And every praise song, some we've sang tonight, light of the world. Praise song, I'm just praising Him, singing to Him. You know what happened? My eyes were opened to a God that was bigger than cancer.

Prayer made unto God, focused upon God. I remember saying that night, what is cancer? What is cancer to you, God, almighty God? And I praised the Lord by His grace throughout the night. And I remember saying, Lord, I praise You, I praise You.

When the sun came up the next morning, Luke opened his eyes. He began to have strength. The Lord touched him.

We walked out of that hospital long before we were supposed to walk out of the hospital. When we did, they had a party for him. A nurse grabbed me by the shoulder and said, this is amazing.

I said, I know, and I'm just praising God. She said, no, you don't understand. I've worked up here for 30 some odd years.

You do not see this. I've never seen it. Where he went through, I've not seen this.

You don't see this, Brian. I praised God. February will be two years, cancer free.

He's healthy, he's strong. He can whip me now. I said, no more wrestling.

We used to wrestle, but no more. Prayer focused unto God. God-sized prayer.

Believing God. He's an almighty God. He's a big God.

But notice what else it was. It was united prayer. It says in verse 5, Prayer was made without ceasing of the church.

Of the church. United prayer. This is prayer when the church, the body of Christ comes together, and we learn later on here in Acts chapter 12, that the church was gathered at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark.

They were gathered together in unity, in one accord, and they're all praying in agreement for Peter, their brother. What a beautiful picture of true Christ-like love and unity. Now Jesus said it this way.

God loves unity in the body of Christ, and He seeks to emphasize it every way in His Word. Here's one place. Matthew chapter 18, and verse 18.

I'll read it up here because I don't... Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

When two, even two or three, are gathered together in His name, this unity that binds our hearts together, this love for Christ and love for one another, Jesus said when He finds that, He is in their midst. He is in our midst. It was united prayer.

The church had come together, and they were praying for their beloved Peter. Listen, when the church stops praying, she starts bickering and backbiting. When the church stops praying, we start criticizing and complaining.

When the church stops praying, she starts decaying from within, and she will soon die. Prayer in one accord, coming together and calling out to God together in one accord. We were having a prayer meeting when I was still at the Baptist church, and the Lord had led us to start praying for people in our community who we knew were lost, to pray for them by name.

List their names, and to pray for them by name. Well, God put one on my heart right away. His name was Leon Alts.

Leon Alts, by this time, was an older man. He was a big mountain of a man, and he had a brother that was just as big as him, named Richard Alts. And Richard and Leon Alts were known by everybody in the community as bullying their way around.

They were belligerent. They were arrogant. They had a reputation.

The first time I met Leon, he called me a coward. He tried to provoke me. He cursed the church.

He said, I would never come to that church. That's the kind of man he was. One night in prayer meeting, I said, we're going to start praying for Leon Alts to get saved.

You know what one deacon told me? Leon Alts will never get saved. He didn't tell me that. He actually told another pastor that.

Leon Alts will never get saved. Another one said, you are wasting your time with Leon Alts. I said, we're going to pray.

And I found more than two to join me in agreement and praying for Leon Alts. Where two or more gathered in My name, there I am. If they shall agree as touching anything, My Father will do it for them in Heaven.

We know from 1 John, if we ask anything according to His will, we shall have what we have asked Him for. And God's not willing that any should perish. I don't believe He's willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

So we begin to pray for Leon. This went on for months. New Year's Eve day, about two years ago.

Guess who walks into my office? I had just come to the office to grab something and I was headed out the door. And as I turned around to leave, this mountain of a man is standing in the door. Only this time, he doesn't have his chest stuck in out and his head high.

He is shaking. He is trembling. He is terrified.

There are tears running down his face. I said, Leon... I almost had to pinch myself to make sure I wasn't dreaming. I said, Leon, what's wrong? He said, I need help.

I need help now. I said, what's wrong? Sit down. He said, last night... Actually, he was already scheduled that week to have a heart procedure done.

Part of his heart was not working. He had several blockages in his arteries. He said, last night, I rolled over.

He said, I'm not even sure I didn't die just for a few seconds. Everything went black. He was shaky.

He was terrified. He said, I knew that I knew that I knew I was going to hell. He said, when I came to, I begged God, please, get me through the morning.

He didn't even sleep that night, begging God to get him through the morning. If You'll get me through the morning, I'll go up there on that hill and I'll meet with Brother Brian and I'll get right with God. I'll get right with You.

I don't know why he didn't know he could get right right there. So he came out there. I shared the Gospel with him.

And I said, now let's get on our knees. And Leon got on his knees. I said, I'm not going to pray for you.

You pray. I knew what kind of man he was. You pray.

You cry out to Jesus. And he did. He cried out for God to have mercy on him, to save him.

He confessed his sin. He asked Jesus Christ to save his soul. And somehow we knew, we knew he had passed from death to life when he got up.

He sat down in his chair. I said, Leon, two things. Number one, everyone in this town knows you.

They know the kind of man you were and have been. You have a reputation. Are you willing to boldly testify of Jesus Christ and what He's just done for you, that He's saved your soul? Are you willing to publicly testify this throughout this town? He said, I am.

I said, will you do it? He said, I will. I said, number two, and before I could say anything, he said, I have to go get right with my brother. I said, that's right.

He and his brother Richard, four years ago, had gotten a fight over a poker game and hadn't spoke to one another for four years. I said, are you going to do that? He said, I don't have a choice. I said, will you do that? He said, I will.

Well, the first commitment he made, remember, was to testify. That was on, I can't remember what night of the week, but the next church night, he went to the Baptist church and he stood up and he testified that

Jesus Christ had saved his soul. He left the Baptist church and he went to the Assembly of God church and asked the preacher if he could just pause for a moment because he had to say a few words.

He stood up front and testified that Jesus Christ had saved his soul. The church was astonished. Their jaws dropped.

He went from the Assembly of God up onto the hill to the Lighthouse church, a non-denominational church up on the hill. They were having revival meetings. He asked permission to testify there.

He testified again that Jesus Christ had saved his soul. Hallelujah! Then, he went to his brother's house, but there were cars lined up outside. He said, I can't do it.

He's got company. So he went down to the cafe and he got him a cup of coffee. He took a sip of the cup of coffee and the Holy Spirit was so convicting him, he said, company or not, I have to go get right with my brother.

He sat down the cup of coffee, drove back to his brother's house and knocked on the door. His brother's wife answered the door and when she saw him, she just backed up, speechless. He said, it's okay.

He said, I've come to speak to Richard. Richard came to the door. Four years they had not spoken.

Richard came to the door and he said, Richard, Jesus Christ has saved my soul and I want to say to you that I'm sorry for everything I've done to you. Will you forgive me? He and his brother embraced these two big men and he began to weep. Both of them began to cry like little children.

Just weep. He was there for four hours. His sister-in-law called me on the phone and said, he just left.

He's been here for four hours. Can you believe this? I said, yes, I can. If my people will pray.

That's something only God could have done. Today, Leon Alts sits on the front row, right over here. Actually, he'd be on that end every single Sunday.

He's a new creation in Christ. If my people will pray. What kind of prayer was it? Focus prayer.

Prayer made unto God. What kind of prayer was it? United prayer. It was prayer made of the church.

They were in one accord. You want unity? Start praying together. God starts shedding light on the difference of these things that will divide us.

He will lead us and guide us into all truth by the power of His Holy Spirit. But if you stop praying, you will start bickering and backbiting and cutting and devouring one another. It's prayer in one accord and lifting our eyes to Jesus that brings about unity in the body of Christ.

Calling upon Him. Now, what else kind of prayer was it? One more I want you to see here in verse 5. But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for Him. Look at those two words.

Without ceasing. Without ceasing. Fervent prayer.

The Greek word here is ektenes. It literally means stretched out, continual, intense. Without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5.17 says pray without ceasing. In other words, it wasn't just a five minute prayer and then we wait to see what happens. This is fervent prayer.

This is prayer that lays hold of God and asks and keeps on asking. Seeks and keeps on seeking. Knocks and keeps on knocking until you get an answer from God.

Many commentators and scholars believe that this prayer meeting that the church had going on at Mary's house lasted for an entire week. A whole week of prayer for their brother Peter. James 5.16 The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

To pray fervently means to pray from your heart. To cry out to God with all that is within you. 1 Samuel 1.15 Hannah was accused of being drunk when she was praying for little Samuel.

We have a little Samuel down here. She said, I have not been drinking. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.

They thought she was drinking. It was fervent prayer. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.

Lamentations 2.19 Pour out your hearts like water before the face of the Lord. Now some would say, now that's not necessary. That's unbelief to ask God for the same thing more than once.

How many times did Jesus pray in the Garden of Gethsemane? How many times did Paul the Apostle pray, Lord, remove this thorn in my flesh, this messenger of Satan? Three times he said he pleaded. No, fervent prayer is praying until you hear from God. Praying until there's a breakthrough.

Laying hold of God. Jesus, it's said of Him in Hebrews 5.7 that in the days of His flesh He prayed with strong crying and tears. One of the greatest needs for the church today is not only that she start praying, but that she keep on praying.

And she pray through. That she prays until there's a breakthrough. Pray until there's revival.

Pray until those souls come to Christ. That she lay hold of God and not let go. Isaiah 66 verse 8 For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

It's a picture of a mother who is in labor. When she travailed, she brought forth. I shared the Gospel.

I mentioned this man last night. 84 years old I think Ted was. I shared the Gospel with him three times.

He was a professed atheist and he would not come to Christ. The third time I remember sharing with him, I got on my knee. I said, well, can I pray with you? He said, yes.

I grabbed his hand and prayed and I looked up and I knew there was a softening finally happening because a tear came down his face. And when his wife saw that tear, she must have saw a wide open door because she started crying and she laid hold of his hand and she said, honey, I have never told you this. 34 years ago, I was outside in the swimming pool and I was crying out to God in prayer and God gave me a promise from the book of Habakkuk.

Listen to this. She opened up the book of Habakkuk and she read the promise that God had given her. When God gave me that promise, she said, I said to him, I will never, never, never, never give up praying until you save my husband.

34 years she prayed for her husband and he began to weep. That very night, she shared the gospel with him. It wasn't me that led him to Christ.

His own wife shared the gospel one more time and said, are you ready to surrender? Are you ready to wave the white flag? That's what she said. Wave the white flag and surrender to Christ. He said, honey, I sure am.

God had to break his heart. He broke his heart through the prayers of his wife and the prayers of his people and Ted Wells was saved. Three weeks later, I preached his funeral.

The fervent prayer of a praying wife. David Brainerd, who ministered to the Indians in his day. It was three years.

He never saw one convert, but he kept on praying. This is how he prayed. This is fervent prayer.

This was written in his diary. David Brainerd stated in his diary, I got up this morning and the Indians were still committing adultery and drinking and beating their tom-toms and shouting like hell itself. I prayed from a half hour after sunrise to a half hour before sunset.

There was nowhere to pray in the Indian camp. I went into the woods and I knelt in the snow. I was up to my chin in snow.

I wrestled in prayer until half hour before sunset, and I could only touch the snow with the tips of my fingers. The heat of my body had melted the snow. That's fervent prayer.

That's prayer that few of us know anything about. Laying hold of God with desperation because you know that He's the only answer. He's your only answer.

He's the only answer for the church today, the only answer for the world today, the only answer for revival today is God. Now, what happens when the church prays like this? Let's read on from verse 5. The prayer was made and then verse 6 says, And when Herod would have brought him forth the same night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains. And the keepers before the door kept the prison.

And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him and a light shined in the prison, and he smote Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals.

And so he did. And he said unto him, Cast thy garment about thee and follow me. And he went out and followed him and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel but thought he saw a vision.

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city which opened to them of his own accord all by itself. And they went out and passed on through one street and forthwith the angel departed from him. When the church prays through, God comes.

And when God comes, prison doors fly open. Chains fall off. Captives are set free from their prisons of darkness when the church prays through.

What else happens? Verse 12. When he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. As Peter

knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken named Rhoda.

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness but ran in and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad, you're crazy. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so.

Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking and when they had opened the door, they saw him and they were astonished. That's what happens when God's people pray through.

God comes in revival. The church is awakened out of her sleep and astonished at the power of God. That's what we need to see, brothers and sisters.

God to move. We need to see what only God can. We've seen plenty of what man can do.

What about what God can do? What can only be explained by God? He's ready, but He waits for His people to humble themselves and pray. If my people will pray. If my people will, then I will.

If my people will pray, then I will move. That's revival. If my people will pray.

I want to share one more testimony with you and then I want to make an appeal. Back to fervent, God-focused, united prayer. Several years ago, I was going out to the truck stops and just preaching the gospel on Wednesday nights and it was myself and three sisters.

One of them in her 80s. They were older sisters, but they were prayer warriors. And they had a van.

And the three sisters and I would go out to the truck stop on Wednesday nights. They would drop me off and they would drive clear across the parking lot where they were not a distraction. Nobody even knew they were there.

And they would watch as I would share the gospel and they would pray the whole time they would intercede. Amazing things happened through that. But one night, there was a man named Roger.

He got out of his truck and he started walking towards the truck stop and I stopped him and we would hand him a little gift. The ladies would make little muffins and that would usually stop a trucker. Some good homemade muffins.

He stopped and I said, can I visit with you for just a few minutes? He said, sure. And I began to share with him the gospel of Jesus Christ and he got so angry at me. He got so angry at me that he raised his voice.

Other truckers thought there was going to be a fight because others gathered around us. He was at the top of his voice. And he said, 30 years ago, I would hit you in the mouth about right now.

I said, Roger, why are you so angry? I'm simply sharing with you the Word of God, the love of Jesus. Why are you so angry? He said, I'll tell you why. And he calmed down, lit up a cigarette, backed against the wall.

He said, I think it was 30 years, he said, 30 years ago, he said, I had a son. Four year old little boy. He said, that four year old little boy came down with a brain tumor.

He said, I was in church Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. Every week. He said, I read that Bible.

You should carry that Bible around. I had a little Bible in my hands. He said, now I know that book was not written by God.

It's written by man. There's nothing to it. He said, the God you're telling me about let that four year old little boy go through five major brain surgeries.

And he said, we prayed over him. He said, my little boy would look up at me and say, Daddy, don't worry. God's going to heal me.

It's going to be okay. He said, the God you're telling me about let that little boy go through five major brain surgeries and he still died. And he screamed out, you tell me why God killed my son.

What kind of God is that? A four year old little boy that has done nothing wrong to anybody. Why did God kill my son? He said, God took my mother. Then he killed my son.

Now he's about to take my wife. I said, what's wrong with your wife? He went on to tell me she was having a procedure done that very, actually the next day. I'll get into that later.

But I said, Roger, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I can't imagine going through what you went through.

But I said, God didn't kill your son. Then tell me why He didn't heal him. What kind of God is that? He said, I'll tell you what I did.

I went out into the country. Nobody was around. He said, I took my Bible and I screamed at God.

And I said, just tell me why. Why did you kill my son? He said, no one answered me. I took my Bible and I threw it on the ground.

Left it there. And I went to the bar. And I've been in the bars for 30 years.

Why didn't He heal my son? I said, Roger, you answer this question first. Why did God give His one and only Son who knew no sin, He did no sin, and He handed Him over to be crucified at the hands of sinful men for me who was a wretched man and for you who hate God. He was blaspheming God.

Why did God crucify, kill His own Son? He shook His head. I said, it's because He loves you so much. We pray every night, every week before we come out here, we pray that God would bring across our path people who need Him.

And Roger, God has brought you tonight. Do you believe God loves you? I said, God loves you. God loves you and God is pursuing you.

And he began to soften, but he by no means came to repentance. I said, well, you received this? It was a New Testament. And he said, yeah, he took that.

I said, can I pray? Can I at least pray for you? He said, no. He said, if you want to pray, pray for my wife. She's going in tomorrow to have a procedure done.

She has a diseased heart and she's got clogged arteries. He said it's very serious. They even said she might not make it through.

He was scared. I said, we're going to pray for your wife. And the Spirit of God come upon me.

And I said, Roger, we're going to pray that God touch your wife and you're going to know it was God and you're going to know that He's pursuing you, that He loves you. We parted ways. I went to the van.

I said, sisters, I'm not sharing anymore tonight. I said, we're going to pray. I told them everything that happened and that van turned into a prayer meeting.

We cried out to God. We laid hold of God for this man and for his wife. We prayed and we prayed and we prayed.

But I never heard anything for three weeks. Three weeks later, I get a call. Brian, this is Roger Bailey.

He says, I met you at the truck stop. Do you remember me? I said, I sure do. You're the one that wanted to beat me up.

He sort of chuckled. I could tell he was broken. He said, you said that you would pray for my wife.

I said, yes, sir, and we have. And we did and we have. He said, Brian, that next day, he said, I wanted to call you the next day but didn't have your number.

He said, you remember that New Testament you gave me? I said, yeah. He said, your number's on the inside of the back cover. He said, I've been reading that Bible ever since this happened to my wife.

I'll tell you what happened to his wife in a minute. I've been reading that Bible. He said, I finally found your number, so I called.

I said, what happened? He said, that next day, or actually, it was that very night, she called me because she was going in the next day. She called me and she said, honey, I think God healed me. She was a Christian.

He said, what do you mean? She said, I don't know. I just felt like God touched me. Like fire went through my body like a whale.

He didn't believe it. She went to have the procedure done the next day. Told the doctor.

The doctor didn't believe it. Said, ma'am, here's your echocardiogram. If we don't do this, you will die.

And she begged and pleaded with the doctor to do the procedure one more time. And he did. And Roger said, these were the doctor's words.

The arteries that were clogged are clean and clear and the heart that was diseased. There's nothing wrong with it. He said to me on the phone, God healed my wife.

I said, yes. Yes, He did. I said, now what about you? He said, oh, I don't know.

See, he had blasphemed God. He didn't feel like there was any hope for him. I said, what about you? He said, I don't know.

He said, I can tell you this, I'm not cussing anymore. I said, well, that's good. But you still need Jesus.

You need Jesus, Roger. He said, well, I'm not ready. He said, can I keep calling you, call you back? I said, you sure can.

It was about two months or so later. I get a call and he says, I'm coming through Boys City and I'll be at that truck stop at 11 o'clock. Can you have lunch? I said, I sure can.

Can't wait to see you. So I went out to the truck stop. 11 o'clock, he walks in the door.

This man that I remember wanted to hit me walks in the door. Heart is broken. He runs up to me and puts his arms around me and just hugs me.

Hangs on to me. He said, she's still healed. I said, that's because God did it.

I said, now what about you? And he went on to tell about his wife. His wife had been so touched by God. And we sat down to have lunch and he said, well, he was so full of shame at his wretched past.

And after that happened to his son, he had committed adultery. He'd done all kinds of horrible things. Lived in the bars.

Didn't know if there was any hope for him, really. We talked for two hours. Walked out to his truck.

I said, well, let me pray for you. He said, no, just wait until I get on the road. So he got in the truck and he headed down the road.

And we called another prayer meeting. We cried out for Roger. He called me that evening.

And I could tell something was different in his voice. He said, I'm going to have to quit coming through there. I said, what happened? What's wrong? He said, I don't know how far I was outside of Boy's City, but he said, I had to pull the truck off the road.

He said, I felt like God was sitting in this truck. He said, I started crying. He hadn't wept like this, he said, since he can remember.

He started sobbing and crying. He said, I started confessing sin. Sin after sin after sin to God.

He said, Brian, I know Jesus has forgiven me. I know I'm saved. He called out to God to save him.

I said, praise the Lord. He went on to share with me. He said, listen to this.

He had written a song. I said, mail me that song. So he wrote it on a piece of paper and mailed it in.

God touched his wife. God saved his soul. That's the best part of it.

And he told me this. He said, for the first time in 30 years, I have peace that my son is in heaven and I'm going to see him again. Praise the Lord.

If my people will pray, if my people will pray, then I will. God waits for us to humble ourselves before Him. To call upon Him in prayer.

To lay hold of Him. Prayer that is focused on God. Prayer that is prayed in one accord, united prayer.

And prayer that is prayed from the heart, fervent prayer. There's some of you perhaps that are facing battles tonight. Your only answer is the grace and power of Almighty God.

God waits for you to call upon Him. There are people out here in chains of sin and darkness and despair. We've already said that.

We know that. What is their answer? Another psychiatrist? Another 12-step program? Handing them a self-help book? None of that will do, brothers and sisters. Their answer is Jesus.

Their answer is the grace and power of God. The power of the Holy Spirit. And God says He gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

Call upon Him. Whatever you face tonight, call upon Him. You may say, my heart's not broken for the lost.

I don't even sense a need to pray. Above all, you need to be at the altar. Saying, God, break my heart.

Give me a broken heart. Open my blind eyes to see what You see. Stir in me a desperation, a thirst for You, Jesus.

A.W. Tozer used to talk about praying until we pray. It's hard to pray. It's hard to pray sometimes.

But if you will step out in faith and just open your mouth and call upon God and you keep on praying, ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and it will be open to you. And knock until it is open. If you will do that, you will find that you will pray until you really pray.

God will bring you into a whole new level of prayer where you know you're touching the heart of God. He is hearing your cry. And He is answering.

And that answer may be yes. It may be no. It may be wait.

It may be my grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness. But God is the answer.

And I'm simply going to ask you tonight as we have an altar call, brother, would you mind coming? Because I want to have another song at the end. Those of you who are desperate for God to move in your church, desperate for God to move in your life, listen, how many of you have sons and daughters? You don't have to raise your hand. Sons and daughters or grandchildren who do not know Jesus.

Prodigal sons and daughters that are not yet home. Who is going to pray for them if you don't? It's time. It's time to stand in the gap and to call upon the Lord with all of your heart.

He's given us promises in this holy book. But He waits for us to lay hold of them and to pray them through. Cry out to God.

When you cry out to God, He will hear. He will answer. I shared at the nursing home today how when we cry out to God, if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will the Heavenly Father, if my children cry out to me, Daddy! And they're in trouble.

What do you think I do? I run to their rescue. I shared this morning at the nursing home when my oldest now, Kaylee, when she was just a little bitty thing, we were out on the ranch and she went out that evening with me to do the chores. We fed the cows and the horses and everything else.

And we went to the chicken pen. And in the chicken pen, we had these big geese. And she was barely walking.

And it was wintertime, so she had a coat on. We walked into that chicken pen and I was busy feeding, watering something. And I heard behind me this scream, Daddy! Help! And I turned around and this big goose had her by the back of the coat and was just flogging her.

What am I going to do? Well, she's been a naughty girl today, so you go ahead, goose. Is that the kind of God we serve? God is always on your side against the devil. God is always on your side against sin.

God is always on your side against what is attacking, destroying. I'll tell you what I did. I ran after that goose and I kicked him up in the air and knocked him out.

He became a football. If he wouldn't have woken up, I'd have had goose for dinner. But that's what I did because my child cried.

And when you cry out to God, God, your Heavenly Father, will incline His ear to hear your cry. And He will come and answer. He waits.

And I'm simply going to ask you, brothers and sisters, those who want to, to come and join me. We have empty pews in the front. We can kneel and call upon God tonight for the unsaved.

First of all, for our own hearts. For the church here. I love this church already.

They're precious people here. But we need the Spirit of God to move in our hearts and lives. We need Jesus to have the preeminence to do what only He can do in this part of Wisconsin.

And I tell you this, it's beyond what we can ask or even imagine if we will trust Him, if my people will pray, lay hold of Him in prayer. If you were living in the day when Jesus was walking the earth, you knew, let's say you knew, He wasn't here, He was in Israel, but you knew He was 50 miles down the road. You've got a problem.

You've got a wayward son or daughter. You've got this or that. Whatever it is.

Would you not do whatever it took to find Him? Whatever it took to lay hold of the hem of His garment? To call upon Him because you know He's the answer. Does it mean anything to you tonight that He sits at the right hand of the Father? Ever living to make intercession for us, He waits to hear your cry. You can lay hold of Him tonight in prayer.

He is here if you will call upon Him. Stand with me. And Father, I pray, dear God, that You would search our hearts tonight and You would call us to Your throne of grace where You invite us with open arms.

By the blood of Jesus Christ, we can come boldly. And I pray, Father, whatever my dear friends out here, whatever burden they're carrying, whatever it is, You know and they know that tonight You would help them to come to the throne of grace and to cry out to You, God, with all their hearts. Help us tonight as we pray.

In Jesus' name, amen. We're going to have a song first and then we'll enter into a time of prayer. I invite you to come.

If you want to come and pray, you come. We can kneel at these pews, kneel at the altar, but you come and join us. If you want to come and pray, if you want to intercede and cry out to God and call upon the Lord, folks, He is a good God.

He is a good God. He is an everlasting Father. Our Father waits for us to call upon Him.

He invites us to come boldly to the throne of grace. This is where it's at. It's not in just hearing a sermon.

It's responding and coming to the throne of grace. It's coming to the feet of Jesus. He's our answer.

He's our Lord. He's our Savior. He's our Deliverer.

It's coming to Father, Abba Father, God Almighty. Call upon Him from the depths of your heart. Revival has to begin in us, in each one of our hearts.

I don't know your need tonight, but I know who does. God knows your need. Now you lift it up to Him right now.

Let's just have a time of prayer as they play softly. Father, I thank You for inclining Your ear to hear the cries of Your children. You incline Your ear to hear their cries, O God.

You look for that kind of prayer that comes from the depths of our heart. Draw near to us, O God, as we draw near to You tonight. Thank You for Your faithfulness, Lord.

Thank You for Your grace and power. Jesus, You said that Your sheep know Your voice. They listen to You.

They follow You. Speak tonight, Lord. Speak tonight, Lord Jesus, to Your people, to Your children.

Let us hear Your voice, Lord, as we wait upon You. Thank You, Lord. Father, we pray for strongholds to be pulled down tonight in the mighty name of Jesus, that You pull down strongholds, walls, O God, of division and separation that are not of You.

Lord, we thank You for that sword that You draw, that sometimes there is not peace but a sword, and we know what that's about. But when it comes to Your people, Your body and Your bride, brothers and sisters in Christ, I pray, God, You tear down every wall that has not been erected by You, and You destroy it in Jesus' name. Lord, You show us in our hearts what is our need.

Show us, Lord God, if there is sin in our life that is grieving Your Spirit, that tonight we may call out to You and repent and forsake that sin once and for all. O Jesus, come and wash us clean. Wash our hearts with Your precious blood.

Bring us to that place of reality, Lord, getting honest with You, being real with You, Lord. Hallelujah. Some of us may be facing things tonight, the insurmountable problems.

We see no light at the end of the tunnel. But Father God, You are God who does the impossible. You are an almighty God and there is nothing too difficult for You.

I'm asking You, Lord God, to perform miracles tonight in our lives, in our families, in our homes. As we lift those petitions up to You tonight, Father, would You do exceeding abundantly above all we could ask or imagine? Would You do what can only be explained by You, Father God? Lord, let faith arise in our hearts to trust You, to do what only You can do, even the impossible. And Father, I pray for Your church here.

I pray, God, for unity. I pray, God, for holiness and purity. And I pray for passion.

Do not let us, do not let Your people fall into the snare of complacency and slumber. But awaken us, O God. Awaken us, O God, with the urgency that the time is short.

I pray, God, that You would give us Your heart. Cause our hearts to break over what breaks Your heart. Cause us to weep over what You would weep over.

Cause us to see others, Lord, through eyes of compassion instead of eyes of criticism. Lord, I pray You would send precious brothers and sisters, saints, out from this congregation. You would send them out throughout this community and give us a holy boldness and a love, a compelling love to approach the sinner with the love of Christ.

To humble ourselves and to reach out in love to those who are perishing. God, help us. Help us to go outside these walls.

Help those, Lord, who are sitting in bars right now, who see no hope. Men like Roger. Maybe they lost a child.

Maybe they went through a divorce. Something. And they're trying to drink it away.

I pray, God, You would show them even tonight as we're praying in this area of Ingram and Ladysmith and all around this part of Wisconsin that, Lord, You would awaken sinners. You would remove the blinders from their eyes, Lord. And show them the emptiness there is apart from You.

And that there is only hope in You, Jesus. Cause them to see, Lord, and let them hear. How will they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they be sent? Send us, God.

Here we are. Send us, Lord. Just to that one person, that one person that You put upon our heart to go to them and to share the love of Christ with them.

Would You help us, God? Would You help us reach out to those who are perishing? Father, I pray for marriages. I don't know situations here, but You do. But I pray for marriages, Lord, that are rocky.

That are having problems. I pray tonight, Lord God, for forgiveness to come into the home. And reconciliation and restoration.

I pray, God, that You would move in the hearts of men to love their wife as Christ loved the church. And wives to respect their husbands and love them and honor them. We pray for marriages to be healed and restored tonight.

We pray for children to be raised up in the fear of the Lord. And a love for Jesus. God, we pray for revival to come to the home.

In Jesus' name. We pray for prodigal sons and daughters who perhaps have left the home and left You, left the church. Walked away like the prodigal son.

My God, we pray tonight that You would awaken them. Get a hold of their hearts and bring them home. Bring them to You, Jesus.

Bring them back, we pray. God, we pray that You would move by the power of Your Holy Spirit Thank You, Father. Thank You for hearing our cries tonight.

We love You. We praise You. We thank You.

We honor You, Jesus. We worship You, Jesus Lord. Folks, just thank Him and praise Him from your heart.

Can we give Him thanks and praise and glory and honor? Hallelujah! You're a mighty God and we love You. We praise You, Jesus. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Folks, you stay at the altar as long as you want to stay.

No one is rushed tonight. This is open-ended. We're going to move into a time of worship now and just singing this song that our brother led us in earlier.

Let's lift our voices to God. Let's give Him praise and glory. This is the first time that I think I've ever sang this song.

But it's a beautiful song to the Lord. Let's sing it from our hearts and worship the Lord together.

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